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THE AGED MINNESINGER.

W. L. SHOEMAKER.

Eheu, fugaces, Postume, Postume,
Labuntur anni.—HOR.
Ars longa, vita brevis.

I HAVE yet a task to do;
Some songs I have yet to sing;
But life exhales, like a drop of dew—
It fleets, like a bird on the wing.

Like a dream has passed my prime;
My roses have ceased to blow;
And the gray-beard Winter is near with his rime,
With his cold, cold winds and snow.

I must sing while yet I may,
Ere my singing days be o'er—
Ere life's light fade from mine eyes away,
And my voice be known no more.

The bird we have heard this year
May return and resume his strain;
But the soul once flown to another sphere
Will never sing here again.

Yet I would, when I bid farewell
To my earthly songs, that some
In the hearts of the young and fair may dwell
For a long, long time to come;

Defying the common doom,
Like flies in amber shrined,
While over my dust the wild-flowers bloom,
And my soul soars unconfined.

And I would that, my tomb above,
The breezes alone may sigh;
And the little birds sing of joy and love,
As once in my youth sang I.

For me no sculptured bust:
Let the flowers my epitaph write:
For my monument, to my songs I trust,
As the ages take their flight.

BIANCA.

From the French.

"I'FAITH, my dear Alfieri, I did not expect the pleasure of meeting you here at Abano."

And he delicately shook the ash from his cigarette.

"It is the place, though, for an invalid."

"Ha, ha! an invalid!" laughed Celini. "You will be ever the same: a misanthrope and a republican; a true descendant of Brutus become a subject of the Pope."

Then, in a more serious tone:

"Do you know, Alfieri, that you merit not the favors fortune has heaped upon you? Our theaters resound with your triumphs; all Italy has its eyes on you; you are noble, wealthy, still young, and you appear tired of life! What is it you desire to make you happy?"

"Good Lord! who knows? Something, perhaps, that is owned by the least of those who watch me from the crowd; an obscure happiness, a little cottage among the trees, and a loving wife seated in my lap."

"But what prevents your having all these?"

Alfieri slightly shrugged his shoulders as he sighed:

"You forget that chance has made me *un homme célèbre*—a rare animal whom all rush to stare at. I seek the shade in vain. Everyone believes he has the right to look into the depths of my existence; my books are like lackeys, who everywhere cry out my name before me. As soon as I appear, each one gets on tip-toe to see over the shoulder of his neighbor. In my presence, women are silent from fear or they pose from vanity. All this makes me suffer."

"I understand; you are unhappy, like a king."

"You deem it a joke, but it is the truth. When I arrived here, I hoped to escape this bore for a few days and live like any one else; I was happy! All at once, the arrival of one man, who had seen me I don't know where, destroyed everything."

"Behold now, the injustice of fate," said Celini.

"Your celebrity galls you; while I, who have worked hard, remain plunged to the ears in my obscurity."

"It is your own fault; you do nothing seriously."

"Quite the contrary! Forget you that I am engaged to an *impresario*; obliged to have three brilliant, witty acts per month? You know not what a theater is, my dear: a sort of cabaret, wherein you draw genius like beer from a pump."

"At the risk of soon finding the leys."

"That is precisely what has happened to me. I lived quite a while on a dozen ideas. You know an idea may be presented in a thousand ways: you put the beginning at the end, the middle at the beginning, and the public call that fecundity! I went

along that way for three years; but, in the end, they saw I gave turned goods for new cloth: they hissed me."

"And what did you then?"

"Why, when I saw I was obliged to find something new, I decided on a trip to regenerate my inspirations; so much so, my dear Alfieri, that it is not I, at this moment, but the Milan theater that is sick and has come to the waters."

"And you think that means will bring you success?"

"It cannot help. There is a crowd here. I cannot but meet many originals, hear anecdotes, discover intrigues. Fifty comedies a day are played here, and as many dramas. It will be strange if I divine not one of them—the more as I am about to adopt the *role* of a spy. Why, already—but you shall hear." And he lowered his voice as he proceeded: "Last night, quite late, being unable to sleep, I descended into the garden. You know the little pavilion at the end?"

"Yes."

"Well, I had just reached it, and was about to pass out of the garden, when I heard a door or a window close suddenly. I turned, and found myself face to face with an unknown."

"What say you?"

"At sight of me he stopped, made a motion as if to speak to me, then turned his back and disappeared."

"You know his name?"

"They call him Marliano."

Alfieri rose suddenly, exclaiming: "At the end of the garden?"

"Yes; under the windows of Madame d'Alcanzo."

Alfieri turned pale.

"You see, I have lost no time. I am on the track of an amorous imbroglio that may furnish me some excellent scenes."

Celini rattled on, far from suspecting the interest his mystery had for Alfieri, or in what anguish his recital had just thrown him.

II.

Madame d'Alcanzo had arrived at Abano, alone, and an invalid, about three months previous. Alfieri had then sought to shun her, and had neglected no occasion to exhibit his coldness; but the young widow undertook the task of breaking through his defence. In consequence, the coldness of the poet insensibly gave place to a benevolent politeness, then to an intimacy each day more familiar. It was the first time he had ever found the graces of woman ennobled by an intelligence that seemed to ignore without abandoning itself. He felt, by degrees, that she entered into his life, and became the most precious part of it.

He was about to tell her so, without doubt, when Marliano arrived. At sight of him, Bianca seemed troubled; she received him with a disguised fear.

From this time, Alfieri perceived that she avoided him. One would have said that this Marliano exercised over her a jealous surveillance, to which she submitted despite herself. During the fifteen days since Marliano had arrived, nothing had revealed his true position near Bianca. The recital of Celini seemed, at first, to clear his doubts, only in blemishing the young widow; but the poet's heart revolted against a suspicion so injurious, and he preferred not to understand than to suspect.

Things were in this condition when, descending one day in the garden earlier than was his custom, Alfieri encountered the young widow seated within an arbor. It was the first time, since the arrival of Marliano, that he had found her alone: he resolved to profit thereby.

At sight of him, Bianca blushed, and Alfieri excused himself for having broken her solitude. Then, suddenly taking her hand, he demanded eagerly:

"What have you against me? and why do you avoid me?"

She trembled as she answered: "I avoid you! What can have made you think so?"

"Believe you, then, that I am blind, signora? For fifteen days this is the first time I can see you and speak with you."

Bianca, an instant disconcerted, quickly recovered herself, and answered, smilingly:

"Are you quite sure the fault was mine? I know how my arrival here troubled you. After a few days' intimacy, you may have retired again behind your barricades."

The poet blushed, and was about to defend himself.

"Oh! do not deny it: you have been denounced

to me. I know that the necessity of waiting for letters has alone kept you here, and forced you to endure my presence."

"I know not who has furnished you these details, signora, but I can no more deny my faults than hide my thoughts. It is true that, at first, your name awoke a painful emotion, and that I sought not to conceal it. But, if that is the cause of the coldness that has succeeded your benevolence, you punish cruelly a sad souvenir that your presence has sufficed to dissipate."

"And may I know this souvenir?"

"That of an old college friend, signora. A year ago I learned that he loved a beautiful and noble woman. I wrote him twice, without reply; at length I received a letter from his mother. His love had been fatal to him; a rival had slain him."

"And you call this friend—?"

"Julio Aldi."

At this name, Signora d'Alcanzo uttered a cry.

"It was thus I heard your name for the first time," continued Alfieri. And, seeing that the young woman had hidden her face in her hands, he added, in a supplicating voice: "Pardon, signora, I have afflicted you!"

"Oh! Mercy! You must have hated me!" she cried, suffocated by her tears.

"Do not believe it, signora. I know you did everything to prevent that duel."

"But too late, too late!"

"The fault was not yours, and Aldi's mother has herself done you justice. I have often blamed my friend for having so readily exposed to the hazard of a duel a life so full of promise as his. I did not then know how painful it was to find ever near the beloved visage another face whose tranquillity insults you. Now I understand how Aldi preferred an almost certain death; for I, man of thought and reverery, who have never touched a sword, I feel the desire to combat; twenty times a challenge has been upon my lips. But I have retained my rage when I have remembered that jealousy was not permitted save to those who may hope for love, while I—"

"How know you that?" she murmured.

"Bianca!" cried he, as he seized her hand; "Have I understood? Speak, in mercy, speak!"

She was about to reply; but suddenly she uttered a cry of fright, and disengaged her hand. The poet raised his eyes. Marliano was standing at the entrance to the arbor!

The Genoese saluted coldly. At sight of him, Bianca fell rather than sat upon the bank seat. As for Alfieri, the sight of that man, at the moment he was about to hear an avowal so long desired, at first drew from him a gesture of anger; but he repressed it in presence of Bianca.

"Pardon," said he, turning toward the Genoese. "Such avowals are not ordinarily made before witnesses."

"I must esteem myself happy," replied Marliano, bowing, "to have inspired Signor Alfieri with confidence enough to open his heart in my presence. A great poet finds an eloquence to speak his love, that others seek in vain."

Alfieri was stung by this subtle irony; he hesitated; but the eyes of the young widow supplicated him. He made an effort at self-mastery, bowed, and left the arbor. Marliano was about to follow him.

"Signor Marliano, you have promised me a reading."

The Genoese turned toward her with a strange smile on his lips.

"You fear for him, then?" said he.

Bianca pressed her hand on her heart, and seated herself without power to reply.

"Well, signora, was I not patient enough with him for him to think me a coward? Are you satisfied?"

"I can stay here no longer. I shall return to Genoa."

"Well, I am ready."

Bianca cast upon him a look of indignation blended with fear.

"Yes; I return to Genoa; but to renounce the world. I shall retire into a convent."

"What say you, signora? You enter a convent?"

"I have decided."

"Impossible! So young, so beautiful, bury yourself in an eternal prison?"

"Am I free now?"

"So," said he, sadly, "it is to fly me that you would leave the world. What have I done to you?"

"Has the Baron de Rocca already forgotten all